



Commencement Address
Pace University
by Admiral Stansfield Turner
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Tape Transcript

America's Changing Role

President Mortolla, , members of the class of 1980, I am indeed grateful that all of you together have asked me to be here today and in so doing, have acknowledged your understanding and your support of the Intelligence Community and the intelligence function of our country. I can say to you that contrary to many of the reports of the media today, the Central Intelligence Agency does not ask to be leaked today; we ask instead and hope for greater understanding of the importance of what we do for our country and for some of the difficulties in performing that function. Again, the fact that you have asked me here is clear indication of your understanding and your support and I most appreciate that.

When thinking what I might to say to you, the members of the Class of 1980, today, quite naturally I thought back thirty-four years to when I was in your shoes and what the world around the United States was like at that time. I had been raised in the Middle West of our country in the 1930's, a period when the spirit of isolationism was very prevalent, particularly, in the mid-West. As I prepared to go to college, I never thought that a large part of my life would be dedicated to support the foreign policy of our country. I don't believe I even envisaged that I would ever travel as far away as Europe. Yet, by the time I graduated in 1946--a moment just like that for you today--the reality of isolationism in America had been extinguished by World War II.

By the end of that war, a profound change had taken place in this country. A country that just twenty-five years before had rejected membership in the League of Nations, the predecessor of the UN. Then in the post-war era, under the great leadership of President Truman, we evolved the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the United Nations' resolution on Korea. The United States in those years became firmly committed to helping our friends and allies defend themselves against aggression. Suddenly America's interests were worldwide and the mantle of free world leadership was upon our shoulders. That changed my life, and that of your parents, markedly.

As you graduate today, I suggest that the United States faces changes in its relationships with the rest of the world that are just as profound and will affect your future just as markedly. The world in which the United States must exist in the 1980's will, I believe, be as different from that of the 60's and 70's as was my graduating world in the 40's from the decades just prior to that.

There is a big difference for you, however. It is that it is very likely that you will have to help our country adapt to this change without the kind of cataclysmic event, like a world war, to awaken us as it did in the 1940's. You will need to define a new role for the United States in its world leadership, in world conditions that are evolutionary and subtle--circumstances that you may not detect if you are not alert.

For example, look at the traditional role of the United States as leader of the Western Alliance. For thirty-five years, we have clearly been the dominant force in that Alliance. Can we expect to remain that dominant in the 1980's? We will still be the largest and by far the most powerful member of the team. Yet you would do well, I believe, to expect surprises from our allies.

Why? The Europeans and the Japanese are prosperous economically. They are stable politically. They feel independent and they deserve to. They still acknowledge, of course, that their security is inexorably related to their relationship with us. But the scramble today for oil and other natural resources has become so vital to them that they must have their own say in how the Western World tackles those problems. The Alliance is not doomed to weaken, but it is bound to function with far more regard for the independent voices of its members. It will be a different Alliance in the decades of your leadership.

If our relationships with our allies are going to change, so too will our relations with our key adversary, the Soviet Union. You will have to adjust to a quite different Soviet Union in the 1980's. From Stalin, Khrushchev, and on through Brezhnev, leadership of the Soviet Union heretofore has been cautious and conservative in avoiding any possible military confrontation with the United States. In the 1980's, however, we will be faced with the first Soviet leadership that does not feel militarily inferior to the United States.

Last December in Afghanistan the Soviet leaders committed their military forces to combat outside of the Soviet Bloc for the first time since World War II. Does this indicate a new aggressiveness, a new willingness to take risks? It seems to me that it does indicate at least that they are likely to take advantage of opportunities that may present themselves in the years ahead.

The CIA, however, has been predicting for a number of years that the economic fortunes of the Soviet Union are on the decline. What impact will this have, you may ask? Well, on the one hand, it may be that there will be pressures in the Soviet Union in the 1980's to undertake military adventures abroad in order to detract attention from their economic failures at home. May they not seek to rectify their problems of diminishing oil using military means? On the other hand, it is probable that their economic weaknesses may keep them at home, tending their own store.

Much depends, of course, on who the leaders of the Soviet Union will be in the 1980's and 1990's. One thing we can say for sure is that the present aged leadership will be gone. We can only predict that whoever succeeds them is unlikely to be as cautious or as predictable in dealing with the United States. You had better be prepared for more surprises from Moscow as you begin to assume the responsibility for our country's fortunes.

One other element of change that you are bound to encounter in the decade ahead will be the scramble for natural resources. The most obvious example is oil. But what about the other imports that we take for granted? We import all of our rubber; all of our coffee, chromium, cobalt, tin, and most of our magnesium and nickel. In all of these and in other cases, nations that used to be pliant to our needs when deciding how much of these resources to produce, are, tomorrow, going to look at their requirements much more than at ours. They will produce only that which generates the revenue which they need for their purposes, or which lets them conserve their natural resources in accordance with their concepts of the future.

When you couple more restrictive production policies with an increasing world population and the rising expectations of that population for a standard of living, you can see that there is taking place a great transference of power to nations that have never before exercised it.

In the decades of the 80's and 90's, you will have to understand those nations, their national aspirations, and the character of their people. You will have to negotiate with them far differently than we have even in the just recent past.

If you are to make sound decisions in the 80's and 90's, you must care about the world around you; pay attention to it. That applies whether your career development will go into government service or whether you contribute as a informed citizen. You must understand how our national interests relate to those of our allies and our potential enemies. Where those interests harmonize and where they conflict. And understanding that, you must help define our nation's role in the world.

This is not an easy challenge that I lay down for you; especially since the pressures on you to conform in outlook are probably going to greater than at any time in this century. Decade is the word that applies to the 80's because it is now, you must recognize, the decade of George Orwell. The class that follows you here at Pace University will be the Class of 1984. Already, George Orwell's "doublethink" is with us in some measure. Today you, as individuals, must stand up to the omnipresent, supremely superficial, instant analyses of our times by the television and news media. Only you can determine whether "Big Brother" will control your thinking; whether your understanding of our nation's role in the world will be dictated by the tube, or molded by your own independent thinking.

That is really why you have been here at Pace University--to develop your creative abilities and to learn to think independently--not just to learn the skills of any particular profession.

I challenge to reason soundly and think deeply about the world of the 1980's, and our nation's role in it because that role will continue to be vital to all free men. We can retain this mantle of world leadership or we can lose it in the decade just ahead. The reins of United States leadership will be in your hands much sooner than you think.

I congratulate you on the achievement of this great step in your lives. I also challenge you, as your careers go forward, to ensure that you seek to repay the privilege of this fine education. Each one of you can repay it by contributing to our nation's understanding of itself and our responsibilities in the complex world which will face you in the decades of your leadership. God bless you and good luck.